You Need Only Ask

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You Need Only Ask

by peacefrog

Summary

> “I want you to…” Will feels suddenly like a bundle of coiled nerves, frayed around the edges. “I want you to hold me. While I sleep.”

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Will has never in his life asked to be cuddled, comforted, or held by another person. Physical contact, outside of sex with the few partners he has had over the years, has been nothing if not awkward, bordering on unbearable. He would hold Molly in post-coital bliss, for her sake more often than not, but you could fit a third body in the space left between them in the night.

Ever since their great fall into the Atlantic, Will can't stop thinking about the concept of being held. Hannibal had held him, timidly, tentatively, as if he were afraid anything more than feather soft touches would break him. As if they weren't dripping in dragon's blood, their own blood, the blood of their sacrifice. The tenderness of that moment suspended over the sea such a stark contrast to the violence that preceded it Will has a hard time grasping it even now.

When they survive, the touches that follow are clinical, wound care for weeks on end. Stitches and gauze and bandages and antibiotics. Being roused in the night for more pills, a cool glass of water held to his lips. Several times, before his fever breaks, a cool cloth being draped across his forehead, a thermometer beneath his tongue. Hannibal makes no move to return them to the point they had reached before they toppled over the edge together.

The thoughts begin in the abstract, small threads of consciousness following him out of dreams. The sensation of a strong hand running along his spine, a solid chest beneath him, frantic heartbeat thumping in his ear. White noise and static, a feeling more akin to floating than falling, pulling him toward some unknown goal, willing him to find something warm and solid to cling to.

Morning after morning, he finds himself watching Hannibal prepare breakfast, mesmerized, and wondering what it would feel like to crowd him against the counter, press himself all along the expanse of his back and never let him go. His hand twitches, nearly reaching across the table, tendrils of curiosity coursing through his veins, the desire to thread their fingers together so overpowering he finds it near impossible to even eat.

It's been months since they arrived, the two of them in their own private villa, the warm summer sun of Lagoa bronzing their skin, the sand and the sea making them whole again as their bodies once again return to strength. They have settled in now, into their new lives, their new identities, but they have not yet managed to settle into one another.

Will knows Hannibal is in love with him, suspects he knew long before Bedelia revealed it to him, tears welling in her eyes, betraying the mask of cold indifference she had worn with him for so long. And if Will is being honest with himself, it has always been requited. Deep, aching, inescapable. A force strong enough to drag him across the ocean and away from everything he has ever known.

Will has never known how to ask for comfort, and Hannibal has proven to be nothing if not a perfect gentleman. They are deadlocked inside of a stalemate that has reached the ultimate impasse.

Will bolts upright in bed, nightmare still clawing at the corners of his mind, antlers like claws pinning him to the ground. Their cold, raven-black tines coiling around him, sinuous and

lithe, velvet burning into his skin. He feels as if he is suffocating, throwing the covers off and padding to the kitchen for a glass of water.

Hannibal sits at the center island, casually sipping chamomile and sketching what appears to be the inlet where their home meets the sea. His pencil stops when Will takes the seat next to his.

“Nightmare?” Hannibal eyes his sweat-soaked t-shirt.

“Yeah.” He ducks his head, cursing himself for not having the good sense to strip it off and change before leaving his room.

“Have they returned?”

“Not like before, these are more…” Will considers his words for a moment. “Abstract.”

“Sensations and unspoken desires haunting you in the night.” It’s not a question. Hannibal has flitted around in his mind long enough to know where Will’s subconscious is liable to take him.

Maybe it’s the unshakable sense that he’s still tucked inside a dream, or the way Hannibal’s hair falls softly around his eyes, longer now than Will has ever seen it. Maybe it’s the way his hands look so inviting, elegant fingers splayed across the countertop, absently tracing the edges of his sketch. Maybe it’s the sudden realization that if he doesn’t push them forward, they will remain locked in this stalemate until their inevitable ends. Whatever it is, Will inhales, exhales, and lets the words spill out.

“Bedelia told me that you’re in love with me.”

“Bedelia’s lies and manipulations far outweigh her truths and sincerities.”

“I know.”

“And yet you know that she was telling you the truth.” Another non-question. Hannibal knows Will was not asking for his confirmation.

“I do.”

Hannibal doesn’t respond, instead turning to calmly rub his pencil over paper once more, smooth lines of graphite blossoming on the page.

“I’ve never…” Will rolls the words around in his mind before letting them flow free from his tongue. “I’ve never asked anyone for what I’m about to ask you.”

The pencil stops again. Hannibal looks up at him through the fringe of hair falling in his eyes.

“I want you to…” Will feels suddenly like a bundle of coiled nerves, frayed around the edges. “I want you to hold me. While I sleep.”

Hannibal considers him for a moment, the slightest hint of a smile tugging at the corner of his mouth, nearly imperceptible, but enough to give him away.

“Would you prefer your bed or mine?”

Will is taken aback by the ease in which Hannibal responds, like Will is asking for nothing at all. Like the air hasn’t suddenly shifted between them.

“I don’t have a preference.” Will laughs nervously, playing with the hem of his t-shirt.

“Mine it is.” Hannibal rises to his feet, striding from the room without another word.

Will finds him tucked into bed when he enters, head cradled atop a mound of plush pillows. He is shirtless, blankets tucked neatly under his arms as he waits for Will to approach.

“I should change my shirt.” Will turns to leave, but Hannibal calls him back before his feet cross over the threshold.

“That won’t be necessary.” Hannibal assures him. “You can leave it on the chair.”

Will strips it off, suddenly aware of how naked he feels in his thin cotton shorts. He slides beneath the covers, pulling them up to his chin.

“I’m not sure how we proceed here.” Will stares up at the ceiling, streaks of moonlight bleeding in through the curtains.

“I can hold you as you are if you prefer, however it will be easier if you turn your back to me.”

Will feels Hannibal shift closer as he turns to lie on his side, warm, solid weight pressing against him from foot to shoulder the moment he settles in. Everywhere their bare skin meets Will feels as if he is alight, flames dancing around his edges, just this side of burning.

“Is this okay?” Hannibal’s breath skims across his neck, arm locking around his chest and pulling him in close.

“It’s…” Will tenses, body uncertain how to react now that they’re here, locked inside of something so foreign it borders on terrifying. “I’m not used to this.”

“If you have changed your mind please let me know.”

“No, It’s… It’s nice.” And it is, once he gives himself permission to relax into it, Hannibal’s embrace far more comfort than confinement.

“I just want you to know, Will.” Hannibal’s words tickle the nape of his neck, lips ghosting over soft flesh, so close to making contact. “If you desire anything more from me, you need only ask.”

Will places his hand atop Hannibal’s, gently threading their fingers together. He considers the implications, wonders how long Hannibal has wanted him to know that. Wonders how long

he has wanted to hear Hannibal say that. Wonders how far past cuddling they would be now if one of them had worked up the nerve to make a move months ago.

The steady thump of Hannibal's heartbeat lulls him into sleep, eyes drifting shut as Hannibal presses the softest of kisses just behind his ear. His last conscious thought before he is pulled under is that he has never felt as safe as he does in the arms of the Chesapeake Ripper.

He dreams of waves lapping at his ankles, golden rays of hot summer sun reflecting off his skin. He dreams in shades of amber and violet, the sky burning up above, waves cradling him below. He dreams of fingers pressing memories into every part of him, a smile whispering promises against his skin.

End Notes

Part two here.

Original prompt here.

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